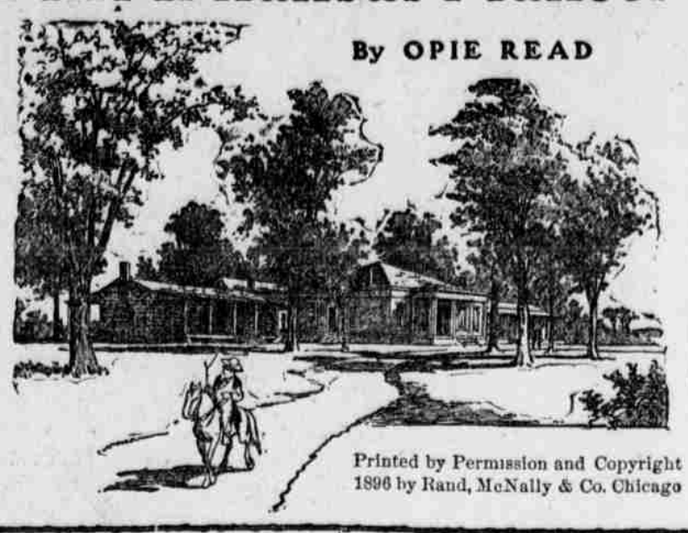
An Arkansas Planter

By OPIE READ



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CHAPTER XI (Continued.)

In prankishness he sought a refuge; he laughed, but she did not follow him. For a moment her black eyes were hard, then came a look of distress—and tears. He put his arm about her. "Why, my dear, I didn't mean to hurt your feelings; bless your life, I didn't. Why, of course, he shan't marry her. Who ever heard of such a thing? I'll talk to him—thrash him if you say the word. There, it's all right. Why, here comes Gid."

She went into the house as Batts came up, glancing back at him as she passed through the door; and in her eyes there was nothing as soft as a tear. The old fellow winced, as he nearly always did when she gave him a direct look.

"Are you all well?" Gideon asked, lifting the tails of his long coat and seating himself in a rocking chair.

"First-rate," the Major answered, drawing forward another rocker; and when he had sat down, he added: "Somewhat of an essence of November in the air."

"Yes," Gid assented; "felt it in my joints before I got up this morning." From his pocket he took a plug of tobacco.

"I thought you'd given up chewing," said the Major. "Last time I saw you I understood you to say that you had thrown your tobacco away."

"I did, John; but, I gad, I watched pretty close where I threw it. Fellow over here gave me some stuff that he said would cure me of the appetite, and I took it until I was afraid it would, and then threw it away. I find that when a man quits tobacco he hasn't anything to look forward to. I quit for three days once, and on the third day, about the time I got up from the dinner table, I asked myself: 'Well, now, got anything to come next?' And all I could see before me was hours of hankering; and I gad, I slapped a negro boy on a horse and told him to gallop over to the store and fetch me a hunk of tobacco. And after I broke my resolution I thought I'd have a fit there in the yard waiting for that boy to come back. I don't believe that it's right for a man to kill any appetite that the Lord has given him. Of course I don't believe in the abuse of a good thing, but its better to abuse it a little sometimes than not to have it at all. If virtue consists in deadening the nervous system to all pleasurable influences, why, you may just mark my name off the list. There was old man Haskill. I sat up with him the night after he died, and one of the men with me was harping upon the great life the old fellow had lived—never chewed, never smoked, never was drunk, never gambled, neer did anything except to stand still and be virtuous—and I couldn't help but feel that he had lost nothing by dying. Haven't seen Louise, have you?"

"No; but I have about made up my mind to go over there, whether she wants me or not."

"I believe I would John. We haven't long to stay here, and nothing sweetens our sojourn like forgiveness. I don't mean it in sacrilege, but Christ was greatest and closest to His Father when he forgave the thief."

"That's true," saaid the Major. "You may not be able to think very coherently, Gid, but sometimes you stroll into a discussion and bark the shins of thought."

"Easy, John. I am a thinker. My mind is full of pictures when your fancy is checkered with red and blue lines. So you are willing to forgive her?" he added after a pause.

"Yes, more than willing. But she isn't ready to be forgiven. She has some very queer notions, and I'll be hanged if I know where she picked them up. At times she's most unnatural."

"Don't say that, John. I gad, sir, what right has one person to say that another person is unnatural? Who of us is appointed to set up the standard and gauge of naturalness? Who is wholly consistent? You may say the average man. Ah, but if everyone conformed to the average ther would be nothing great in the world. There is no greater bore than the well-balanced man. He wears us out with his evenness. You now what he's going to say before he says it."

"I grant you all that; but the well-balanced man made it possible for the genius to make the world great. Genius is the bloom that bursts out at the top of commonplace humanity."

"Yes, that's all very well;' but just at present I'd like to have a little liquor. Be easy, though, and don't let the madman know what you're after."

"There's not a drop in the house, Gid, but there's a demijohn in the office. Let's step out there."

"No, I believe not, John," the old fellow replied, with a shudder. "Can't you bring it out?"

"She'll see me if I do. You must go with me. Whisky that's not worth going after is not worth drinking."

"You are right, John; but you have stated one of these truths that are never intended to be used except in the absence of something else that might have been said. Plain truths are tiresome, John. They never lend grace to a conversation."

"What do you know about the graces of conversation? You are better fitted to talk of the disgraces of conduct."

"Slow, John. But I know that a truth to be interesting must be whimor so blunt that it jolts."

"But didn't it jolt you when I said that you must go into the office after the liquor?"

"Yes; but cruelly, John. You must never jolt cruelly. I gad, I'm getting old. Do you realize that we have known each other intimately for 35 years?"

Mrs. Cranceford came out upon the porch. "Ah, said old Gid, without changing his tone, and as if he were continuing a moral discourse, "thirty-five years ago we heard an old circuit-rider preach at Gum Springs, and while we could not subscribe to his fiery doctrine, being inclined to the broader and more enlightened faith of the Episcopal church, yet the fervor and sincerity of his utterances made a lasting impression on us. Madam, I hear with much pleasure that Mr. Pennington is better."

"Yes, he is feeling quite improved," she replied, merely glancing at him. "Did the Major think enough of him to tell you?"

The Major looked at Gid, winked at him, and the old fellow believing that he knew what was wanted, thus answered: "Yes, ma'am, but I first heard it from the priest. He knows everything, it seems. I met him down the road and had quite a talk with him. By the way, I read a number of years ago a most edyfying book, 'The Prince of the House of David.' You doubtless have it in your collection, and may I ask you to lend it to me?"

She had but small faith in the old fellow's sincerity, and yet she was pleased to see him manifest an interest in so goodly a book. "Yes, and I will get if for you," she answered, going straightway to look for it; and when she had passed through the door, Gid snatched a bottle out of his pocket and held it out toward the Major. "Here, John, hurry out there and fill this up while she's gone. Meet me around at the gate. Quick!"

"Why, you old rascal, do you suppose me capable of complicity in such a fraud?"

"Oh, that's all right, John. Hurry up. I could get liquor, plenty of it, but yours always hits me where I live. I'm sick, I tell you, and hang it, I'm getting old. You don't seem to realize that I'm an old man, not long for this vain world. Take it John, and hurry up. Confound it, you won't be deceiving her; it would be an advantage taken of her unreasonable prejudice. You never saw me drunk and never will. Thunderation, here she comes!"

He stuffed the bottle back into his hip pocket and the Major threw himself back with a loud laugh. Mrs. Cranceford, handing the book to Gid, cast a suspicious look at the Major, who continued to shake. "Why, what has amused you so?" she asked. And now old Gid was nodding and chuckling in hypocritical diversion. "I was just telling him of the first time I borrowed a copy of this book," he said. "Walked four miles to get it, and when I returned, some rascal had greased the foot-log and I slipped off into the creek. Oh, it's very funny now, but it wasn't then; had to fight to keep from losing the book and came within one of drowning. Well, I must go. Ma'am, I'm a thousand times obliged to you for this storehouse of faith, and I assure you that I'll take the best of care that it shall come back to you in good condition. By the way, John, is your office locked? I'll step out there and get that paper."

"Yes, it's locked. I'll go with you."

"Oh, never mind. Let me have the key."

"But you can't find the paper."

"Well, let it go; I can get it some other time."

The Major, slyly shaking, walked with him to the end of the porch. "You've played thunder," the old fellow whispered. "I didn't think it of you. I gad, every chance you get you hoist me on your hip and slam the life out of me. Sick as a dog, too. Again, ma'am," he added, turning about, "let me thank you for this book. And Major," he said aloud, and "damn you," he breathed, "I hope to see you over my way soon."

He swore at his horse as he mounted, and throwing back a look of reproach, he jogged off down the road. But he had not proceed more than a mile when a boy, urging a galloping horse, overtook him and gave him a bundle; and therein he found a bottle of whisky, with these words written in

"SALLIE"

red ink and pasted on the glass: "You are an old fool."

CHAPTER XII

All day the clouds had been gathering, hanging low over the fields. At evening came a downpour of rain, and at night a fitful wind was blowing—one moment of silence and then a throb of rain at the windows. In his office the Major sat, looking over the affairs of his estate. It was noted that he preferr a stormy night thus to apply himself; the harshness of figures, the unbending stubbornness of a date, in his mind seemed to find a unity with the sharp whistle of the wind and the lashes of rain on the moss-covered roof. Before him, on yellowing paper, was old Gid's name, and at it he slowly shook his head, for fretfully he nursed the consciousness of having for years been the dupe of that man's humorous rascality. The plantation was productive, the old fellow had gathered many a fine crop, and for his failure to pay rent there could be no excuse, except the apologies devised by his own trickish invention. Year after year, in his appeals for further indulgence, he had set up the plea of vague obligations pressing upon him, some old debt that he was striving to wipe out and from which he would soon be freed; and then, no longer within the tightening grasp of merciless scoundrels, he would gratefully devote the proceeds of his energies to the discharge of the obligations held so lightly over him by the noblest man on earth. Once he returned from New Orleans, whither he had gone to sell his cotton, with the story that he had been knocked senseless and robbed of his wallet, and in proof of this he produced a newspaper account of the midnight outrage, and exhibited a wound on the head, inflicted by the bludgeon of the footpad. And with such drollery did he recite this story that the Major laughed at him, which meant, of course, that his tenure of the old plantation was not to be disturbed. The memory of this rascally trick came back to the Major as he sat there looking over his papers. He recounted it all as a reminiscence of his own weakness, and he was firmly and almost angrily resolved that this season the old fellow should not waddle from under his obligations. Amusement was well enough; to laugh at a foible was harmless, but constantly to be cheated was a crime against his wife and his children. Children? Yes, for out of no calculation for the future did he leave Louise.

Ther came atap at the door. Mrs. Cranceford had sent a negro boy with an umbrella and a lantern. The night was wild, and the slanting rain hit hard. Before he reached the house the wind puffed out als lantern, leaving him to stumble through the dark.

As he stepped upon the porch there was a loud "halloa" at the gate, and just at that moment he heard his wife's voice. "John, go out there and see who that is," she said.

He went round to the gate. His wife stood on the porch waiting for him. Presently he came back, walking rapidly.

"Who is it, dear?"

"A negro man. Margaret, we must go at once to Louise. Pennington is dying."

With an inarticulate note of astonishment she fled to her room, to prepare herself for the journey, and the Major loudly commanded the carriage to be brought out.

Lanterns flashed across the yard, under the streaming trees, and flickering in the gale that howled about the barn.

Pale, impatient, and wrapped in a waterproof, Mrs. Cranceford stood at the front doorway. The carriage drew up to the gate. "Are you ready?" the Major asked, speaking from the darkness in the midst of the rain.

"Yes," she answered, stepping out and closing the door.

"Where is Tom?" the Major inquired.

"He hasn't come home."

"He ought to go. I wonder where he can be."

"He could be most any place," she answered; and as she stepped under the umbrella to walk with him to the gate, she added: "But I think he is at Wash Sander's house."

He helped her into the carriage, took a seat beside her, and shut the door with a slam. "As fast as you can!" he shouted to the driver. They sat a long time in silence, listening to the rain and the hoofs of the horses sloshing in the wet sand. The carriage stoped.

"What's the matter?"

"De bayou, sah."

"Drive on."

"De bridge is full o' holes."

"Drive through."

"De water's mighty high."

"Drive through."

Down they went with a splash. The carriage swayed, was lifted, was swung round—the horses lunged; one of the doors was burst open and the water poured in. Mrs. Cranceford clung to the Major, but she uttered not a word. Up the slippery bank the horses strained. One of them fell, but he was up in a moment. Firmer footing was gained, and the road was reached. Now they were in a lane. The Major struck a match and looked at his watch. It was nearly 2 o'clock. Across the fields came a light—from Louise's window.

The carriage drew up at the gate.

"That you, Major?" a voice asked.

"Yes. Why, how did you get here, Jim?"

"Tore down the fences and rode across the fields."

"How is he?" the Major asked, helping his wife to the ground.

"I haven't been in—been walking up and down out here. Thought I'd wait for you."

At the entrance of the passageway Louise met them. She kissed her mother, saying not a word. The Major held out his arms toward her. She pretended not to notice this complete surrender; she took his hand and turned her face from him.

(To be Continued)

The Sky.

John Ruskin, the great art critic, wrote in his "Modern Painters," "The sky is not blue color merely; it is blue fire and cannot be painted."

THE COMMON HOUSE FLY

IT IS A PROLIFIC TRANSMITTER OF CONTAGEOUS DISEASE

With summer almost upon us and screens and awnings put on the hotels and residences it behooves the careful citizen to look to his health as at no other time of the year, and with this in mind his first attention should be directed to the common house fly. If not an exploded theory that flies are the scavengers of the air, it has been scientifically proven that man can do very well without them, for in those localities where proper precautions against their breeding have been taken a better average of health has been maintained and no trouble experienced because of any extra contamination of the air.

Dr. L. O. Howard, the entomologist of the department of agriculture, is the authority for the statement that he generation of the house fly is limited to ten days, and when to this statement is added that a female deposits about 120 eggs at a time, simple calculation of the off-spring of a single fly that has chosen to remain with us during the winter in order to get an early spring start will result in figures that will startle and terrify. The whole number of children and children's children and children's children's children, and so down the line of figures during the summer is beyond belief and, when written, quite impossible of comprehension. As an illustration it may be assumed that a female fly deposits 120 eggs, from which are developed an equal number of male and female offspring. Taking this as a base for calculation and assuming that with each hatching of the resultant flies there will be an equal division of sex, it will be found that at the end of the seventh generation, or less than two and one-half months from the laying of the first egg, the enterprising Mrs. Fly will have acquired an interesting family numbering 5,657,003,559,320 individuals, the chief object of each of which seems to be to drown himself in the coffee or trim his finger nails on the point of the human nose. And it must not be forgotten that this calculation does not take into consideration the fact that there may in some hatchings be a preponderance of females, in which case the total would be startlingly augmented.

According to Dr. Howard the disease that is most commonly transmitted by the house fly is typhoid fever, and to avoid the ill we must get at the root of the evil and effect a remedy. This is cleanliness about the house and yard, particularly about stables, for it is in these latter places that flies breed. It has been found that when precautions were taken with regard to the cleanliness of stables the number of flies was so perceptibly diminished as to make them scarcely noticeable, with a corresponding diminuition in disease of all kinds. With the germ theory fully developed and substantiated by experiments during a course of years it is now known that it is in this manner alone that disease is spread, and the fly is responsible for all that the mosquito, nea and one other little insect, unfortunately well known in many of the best families, are not.

The first of all measures to be taken, says Dr. Howard on the subject, is to screen the house thoroughly, killing all flies and mosquitoes that may have got in before this is done. If the house once gets filled with flies it is a difficult problem to eradicate them, but with these domesticated ones there is small danger—though much annoyance. The danger lies in the entrance of flies from an infected locality, for when they alight upon the food prepared for the table the disease germs that they brought with them from the neighboring house of illness are deposited on the food and the person who partakes of it is very likely to contract the disease.

The close relationship between flies and disease and death is a matter that calls for the unremitting attention of all the people so that drastic measures may be taken to check the cause. Although every fly that enters the house does not carry the germs of typhoid on his feet he certainly does if he has lately visited a house where that illness exists, and it requires only the proper conditions for the inmates of the next place of his visitation to contract the illness.—Washington Star.

Only the judge at a prize baby show knows how to sympathize with a baseball umpire.

New Worm is the Farmer's Friend

The agricultural department at Washington has sent an expert to the Pacific coast to investigate the habits and general appetite of a new worm, which has made its appearance in the Waalla valley.

It is probably the most remarkable worm that has ever turned out from the laboratory of nature. It is the friend of the farmer. It is the only worm that has ever been known to prefer noxious weeds to the sweet cereals grown by the Washington husbandman. No professor of wormitude hereabouts has ever seen the like.

The worm is coming down the fertile inland valleys in a crawling army a hundred miles long and several miles wide. Evereywhere its approach is heralded with acclaim by the farmers. There is talk among the legislators of imposing a fine for its destruction. It is also possible that "wormeries" may be started for its propagation.

In appearance it is a small drab colored object with a striated back and an incredible appetite for weeds. It eats kirtle-burr as a Mexican burro eats thistles. Smartweed is pie for it; even fennel and ragweed do not seem to tax the capacity of its stomach.

Wheat fields over which it has passed are weeded out as thoroughly as a farmer could do it. Cornfields remain untouched while the vegetation between the stalks is cut down and eaten.

The worm travels six to eight feet per minute. In many places they number 100 to the square yard. On the farms near the coast they are spining webs with the apparent intention of turning into a new moth or butterfly. Millions are being drowned in the irrigation ditches which become almost choked wth bodies when the onward march reaches them.

It is claimed by persons connected with the State Agricultural Bureau that the worm is the product of moths which were accidentally brought over from China in the importations of Chinese vegetation by travelers from this state.

Wherever the wonderful worm may hold forth in its original state it is certainly proving a blessing to the Washington farmers.

When a man's foot gets tangled up with a woman's under the table and she gets mad about it, you can make her madder by pretending you thought it was somebody else.

"HOME, SWEET HOME!"

Sioux City Philosophy

The rain comes whether it is welcome or not.

It is a popular fallacy that men who have never achieved success have nothing to bother them.

Reputation is of such slow growth that it seems the allotted age of man should be extended.

The shady side of the street is so popular on a hot day that men take off their hats to it.

Women with big hats and summer silks are frequently found on the streets blowing at the weather.

The waists worn by the women are made to deceive.

No man wants the whip at the hands of another, but provision for the lash should not be neglected.

A prudent man will observe his wife closely in making his explanation.

A lie is always insubordinate.

Political ethics holds professorships in the school of revenge.

Per Capita Money.

With a poplation of 5,000,000, Colombia has an aggregate circulation of $700,000,000 in paper currency. This is a per capita circulation of about $140, or nearly five times as much as we have in this country. The "per capita man" ought to be happy down in Colombia, but there is nothing in the record to indicate that he is.—Sioux City Journal.

∴ Figs and Thistles ∴

Fruits depend on roots.

It is the soul that sees.

To shirk is to surrender.

You forget to limp when you learn to laugh.

Reverence is the sign of reality in religion.

Man's booty cannot be God's bounty.

When the office is compelled to seek the man it's doughnuts to fudge that there is no salary attached.

What a happy old world this would be if men who don't know anything would only keep it to themselves instead of telling it!